Breaking Down Machismo: Shifting Definitions and Embodiments of Latino Manhood in Middle-Aged Latino Men

Luis A. Valdez[1] [iD], Emily C. Jaeger[2], David O. Garcia[3], and Derek M. Griffith[2,4] [iD]

Abstract

There is a notable gap in empirical research regarding how Latino men define and demonstrate machismo, masculinity, and manhood as well as the behavioral consequences associated with these concepts. In our study, we employed a phenomenological thematic approach to analyze 20 semi-structured individual interviews conducted with Latino men residing in South Florida. Our primary objectives were twofold: to examine (1) how do Latino men ages 35 to 60 years describe what it means to be a man and (2) what are the attributes that these men seek to show others that demonstrate their character, cultural values, and gender identity. Findings suggest that Latino men understood expectations associated with machismo and explained that fulfillment of their role as provider, protector, and head of the family was important to their perception of self. While some participants reported a desire to embody characteristics associated with traditional machismo, others strived to demonstrate character, familism, and respect and to provide financial and other instrumental support to their families. Participants reported that their transition into middle age was accompanied by a shift in their perspectives on gender roles, moving away from rigid patriarchal views. Exposure to a more fluid and flexible approach to manhood offered relief from the pressures associated with inflexible manifestations of machismo, which can have negative social, behavioral, and physical health implications. The implications of our research extend to the conceptualization of gender ideals, highlighting the need to incorporate intersectionality, role strain, precarious manhood, and culturally specific notions of manhood as foundational elements in this discourse.

Introduction

There is a growing body of literature exploring how race, ethnicity, sociocultural norms, and age complicate and refine men's masculinities, gender ideals, and aspirations (Griffith, 2012; Griffith et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2020). There is a dearth of empirical findings that explore this from the perspective of Latino men. The construct of *machismo* originated from work with Mexican-origin men and has been used colloquially to characterize all Latino men (Peñalosa, 1968; Torres et al., 2002). Given the heterogeneity (culture, nativity, generational status, acculturation, etc.) of the Latinx population in the United States and fluidity in gender ideals and expression, these

standards may not apply equally to all Latino men. More research is needed that explores how masculinities,

[1]Dornsife School of Public Health, Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA, USA
[2]Center for Men's Health Equity, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA
[3]Mel & Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health, The University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, USA
[4]Department of Health Management and Policy, School of Health, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA

Corresponding Author:
Luis A. Valdez, Dornsife School of Public Health, Drexel University, Room 309, 3600 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, USA.
Email: lav53@drexel.edu

manhood, machismo, and gender expressions by Latino men may be diverse and change throughout the life course.

This information is necessary to better understand the most salient approaches to use when working with and engaging with Latino men in efforts to improve their health. Latinxs are the largest and one of the fastest growing subpopulations in the United States, expected to make up 25% of the U.S. population by 2050 (Flores, 2017). With a median age of 30 years, Latinxs are among the youngest ethnic groups in the United States, but their median age is increasing (Flores et al., 2019). To enhance the ability to conduct research that explores ideals, expectations, values, and goals at the intersection of what it means to be adult, male and Latinx, we analyzed qualitative data from interviews with Latino men to better understand self-conceptualizations of what it means to be a man, and how their conceptualizations of masculinity, manhood, and machismo may change as they age.

Here is a brief note about our operationalization of evolving terminology: For the purposes of this work, we refer to *masculinity* as the overarching, idealized set of norms, beliefs, and attitudes that characterize persons who identify as boys or men think about themselves in a given time, culture, and place (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). While these ideals are often reduced to characteristics of the individual (e.g., how norms, beliefs, and attitudes are internalized), masculinity is socially contingent and broader than the pejorative explanation for men's health-harming behaviors and includes the wider social, cultural, economic, and political context (Robertson et al., 2016). The myriad ways that men practice and embody aspects of these hegemonic ideals—whether specific to ethnic identification or not—are *masculinities* (Creighton & Oliffe, 2010). *Machismo* is one form of masculinity that reflects an externally imposed ethno-specific set of gender ideals for Mexican-origin men (Arciniega et al., 2008). Machismo has been assumed to be relevant to Latino men from other contexts, but there is little empirical evidence for that generalization. *Manhood* is a form of masculinity that reflects a gendered, aged, racialized, and class-bound social status that includes positive roles, goals, and values that men aspire to embody and fulfill (Griffith, 2015; Griffith & Cornish, 2018). Finally, we use Latinx when speaking of the community, as a whole, to remain gender-inclusive while using Latino when describing men, in particular. Finally, we use terms like *Mexican-origin* when referring to specific Latinx subgroups where relevant.

Machismo

The construct of machismo was originally conceptualized to typify masculinity in Mexican-origin culture (Diaz & Diaz, 1966; Paz, 1961; Peñalosa, 1968). Both in scholarly literature and in popular culture, machismo is related to the negative characteristics associated with patriarchy, sexism, and chauvinism (Arciniega et al., 2008; Chant & Craske, 2003). Machismo, much like the concepts of *hypermasculinity* (Pitt & Sanders, 2010) and *toxic masculinity* (Harrington, 2021), has been historically used to malign marginalized men even though hegemonic masculinity and its implications cut across race, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status, and social stature (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Jewkes et al., 2015). This tendentious conceptualization has resulted in an unwarranted vilification of Latinx masculinity into a monolithic collection of behaviors that uphold societal norms in which men hold all the power and women are largely excluded from it.

Through the development of the *Traditional Machismo and Caballerismo Scale*, Arciniega and colleagues (2008) were the first to attempt to identify and simultaneously measure duality in machismo: *Traditional Machismo* associated with health-harming behaviors (aggression, dominance, self-reliance, etc.), and *Caballerismo*, associated with health-beneficial behaviors (emotional connectedness, self-care, familism, etc.). While only implicitly, the caballerismo subscale encompasses the intersection of age and adulthood, as it elicits perspectives of being a working man and a father (Arciniega et al., 2008). Machismo, whether considered as a singular construct or a composite of spectra that represent both hegemonic and positive notions of masculinity, is a gravely limited Westernized characterization of Latinx masculinity. Contemporary efforts to isolate and redefine adult Latinx masculinities beyond this perspective have largely been limited to work with Latinx college students (Sáenz et al., 2015; Saez et al., 2010), which may restrict the generalizability of these findings to specific sociocultural and socioeconomic subsets of Latino men across the adult life course.

It is worth mentioning that the constructs that attempt to capture the unique notions of Latinx masculinity lack consideration of self-conceptualizations and practices that existed before the violent colonization of the Americas (Adames & Chavez-Dueñas, 2016; Hardin, 2002; Morales, 1996) that imposed White supremacist heteronormative patriarchy (Hooks, 2004) on Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous communities (Mirandé, 2016; Morales, 1996). This has led to the intentional erasure of broader, more fluid, egalitarian, and positive conceptualizations of masculinity that have existed and currently exist within some Indigenous communities from which U.S. Latinxs originate (Mirandé, 2016; Morales, 1996). As an example, the detrimental perceptions of Latinx masculinities or "machismo" in Latino men can be traced back and attributed to maladaptive manifestations of male behavior as a direct result of the violent oppression

and forced loss of language, culture, family, material possessions, freedom, and place by Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous men in the process of colonization (Adames & Chavez-Dueñas, 2016; Hardin, 2002; Mirandé, 2018; Morales, 1996). This is further disentangled by the *Compensatory Model* that argues that during the process of colonization, both Indigenous and African men (who were brought to the Americas in the slave trade) suffered catastrophic losses as a result of racism, oppression, and enslavement (Adames & Chavez-Dueñas, 2016; Hardin, 2002; Mirandé, 2018). The Compensatory Model posits that this collective loss of power and agency led to the negative behaviors associated with *machismo* in Latino men today as a process retaining power over those they could control, their families (Rodriguez, 1999).

Even positive conceptualizations of Latinx masculinity such as caballerismo as an inverse portrayal of traditional machismo's hegemonic notions remain dependent on restricted views of men that limit considerations of fluidity in gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality. Even a superficial unraveling of the central concept of caballerismo exemplifies this idea. The term *caballero* is historically used in reference to a Spanish gentleman and in the Southwest U.S. has typically referred to a horseman (*caballo*, the root of caballero is Spanish for horse). To be a *caballero* would be considered the pinnacle of benevolent Latinx masculinity that is achieved by one's proximity to Eurocentric ideals of chivalry and the resulting erasure of Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous masculinities that predate these contemporary conceptualizations. Heteronormativity is a persistent issue in the Westernized characterization of Latinx masculinity as well (Mirandé, 2016). The notion of caballerismo relies on men existing in limited gender identity/expression and sexual binary where the optimal objective of this "positive" spectrum of masculinity is centered in being a hardworking, cis-gendered, heterosexual, family provider. Adherence to caballerismo, based on the idea of benevolent White supremacist patriarchy, rewards some Latino men (White cisgender, heterosexual) and subjugates others (Afro/Indigenous, queer).

Exploring Masculinities

Traditional beliefs about masculinity, gender expression norms, and masculine identity are socially constructed and greatly influence behaviors and an individual's perception and embodiment of what they believe it means to be a man (Courtenay, 2003; Daniel-Ulloa et al., 2017; Garcia et al., 2017; Griffith et al., 2011; Saez et al., 2010). Men's behaviors are shaped more by trying to explicitly avoid behaviors that are perceived as feminine (e.g., applying sunscreen, or eating healthy) than to behave in ways that are explicitly masculine (Vandello et al., 2019).

How these conceptualizations shape the meaning of masculinity and successive performances affecting and motivating both positive or negatively perceived behaviors is governed by a complex interplay between several determinants, including age, race, and ethnicity (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Griffith & Cornish, 2018; Griffith et al., 2019). In particular, it is important to consider how age affects self-conceptualizations of machismo and governs how Latino manhood is learned, reproduced, demonstrated, and influences behaviors across the Latino male life course.

Manhood reflects a gendered, aged, racialized, and class-bound social status that reflects positive roles, goals, and values that men aspire to embody and fulfill. Achieving this social status is difficult to achieve but easy to lose, generating a precarious notion of manhood as something to be greatly desired and requiring constant maintenance or else face collapse (Griffith, 2015; Griffith & Cornish, 2018; Vandello et al., 2019). Precarious manhood theory posits that manhood is often conceptualized as a social status under constant threat and that ultimately governs the way that men function across several life domains (Vandello & Bosson, 2013; Vandello et al., 2019). Manhood is viewed as status that must be achieved, validated by others, and retained through a collection of public demonstrations that often involve risk as a matter of proof (Vandello et al., 2008). Researchers suggest that this precariousness and associated distress is exacerbated for minoritized populations, especially at key developmental phases of life, which is particularly true for Latino men (Lu & Wong, 2014; Vandello et al., 2019).

Middle Age

Middle age can be defined by age, role, responsibility, personal characteristics, or some combination of these factors (Griffith et al., 2019; Lachman, 2004). There is little agreement on how to define the boundaries of this phase of life by numerical age, though sometimes middle age is divided into early (30–49) and late (50–64) middle age (Griffith et al., 2019; Lachman, 2004). There is more agreement, however, that middle age is a state of mind, or the assumption of certain social roles and responsibilities rather than a defined range of ages (Griffith et al., 2019). Across racial and ethnic groups, middle age is often the time when sacrifices in other important areas of life, such as health, are made to maintain the fulfillment of family-related roles (e.g., father, provider, husband; Griffith et al., 2019). Middle age is when men are faced with the reality of juggling ongoing everyday stressors and multiple responsibilities and may begin to experience physical and cognitive signs of aging (Griffith et al., 2019). Demands of being a man in midlife differ from those of childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood and this phase of life often includes the lowest points of life satisfaction in the

lifecycle as men adjust their perceptions and definitions of what it means to be a man to more and different stressors and role strains (Griffith et al., 2019). Research that focuses on this phase of life is needed to better understand the differences in the determinants, perceptions, and experiences of men as they move through the life course (Cornish et al., 2017; Thorpe et al., 2015). A life course perspective with a focus on midlife is important in helping us better understand how gendered norms, beliefs, roles, and expectations evolve over time and at different ages (Thorpe et al., 2015). This understanding can help us make better sense of age-related changes to self-conceptualizations of manhood and masculinity and the health behavior–related implications thereof.

Despite the body of literature that exists in these areas—masculinity, manhood, machismo—very little of this work reflects or is rooted in the explicit perspectives of Latino men, particularly those who are not of recent Mexican-origin and those who are in a particular phase of life (i.e., middle-aged men). We know particularly little about how more specific subpopulations of men (e.g., being an Indigenous or Black-presenting Latino man or one of a particular age) add to the complexity and precarity rooted in existing in an inherently prejudiced and structurally unequal society (Mullany et al., 2021; Robinson et al., 2021). It is important to consider the intersected identities that represent the likelihood of exposure to stressors and barriers that make the ability to maintain statuses even more difficult in ways that compound stress, strain, and distress for Latino men.

Therefore, the two primary research questions guiding this article are the following: (1) "How do Latino men ages 35 to 60 years describe what it means to be a man?" and (2) "What are the attributes that these men seek to show others that demonstrate their character, cultural values, and gender identity?" To answer these questions, we explicitly use an intersectional approach. Building on the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, Lisa Bowleg, and others (Bowleg, 2008, 2017; Crenshaw et al., 1995), we aim to understand how middle-aged Latino men define their gendered ideals with the understanding socially defined and socially meaningful characteristics (e.g., age, ethnicity, gender identity) are inextricably intertwined and experienced simultaneously. An intersectional approach helps us consider how the identities of these men—all of whom share a phase of life (middle age), ethnicity (Latinx), gender identity (men)—are comprised of more than looking at their identities through the lens of one of these factors at a time. We cannot presume to know which of these factors middle-aged Latino men see as central or salient to their identities or ultimately to their health and well-being. Explicitly, we employ a semi-structured, qualitative approach explicitly because we do not want to presume which factors middle-aged Latino men see as

most stable and important to how they see themselves (centrality), and which aspects of self-definition or self-concept are likely to be shaped by the situation, context, or event (salience; Griffith et al., 2022; Sellers et al., 1998). Employing an intersectional approach to semi-structured interviews allows space for men to create ways of characterizing how they see themselves and their ideals in ways that can be mapped onto, but not limited by, existing notions of ethnicity, gender identity, machismo, or other constructs.

Method

This article presents the findings from interview data with Latino men that were collected as part of the formative work of a larger study to inform the development of tailored messages to use in a weight-loss intervention for middle-aged African American men in Tennessee and Latino men in South Florida (Griffith et al., 2020). Based on the literature, the larger study was designed with the understanding that the gender ideals that African American and Latino men were qualitatively different, and thus the messages to motivate men to engage in healthier behavior may be more effective if they sought to capture and reflect their cultural differences.

Setting

The study was conducted in community locations in South Florida (i.e., Miami, South Miami, Hialeah) between November 2017 and May 2018. Latinxs make up approximately 68.6% of the population of Miami-Dade County (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Interviews were conducted at various locations throughout the community, including construction site office spaces, conference rooms at community health clinics who regularly partner with the research center, and conference rooms at the university.

Recruitment and Participants

Convenience sampling was used to recruit Latino men via flyer postings at community locations (community centers, restaurants, hardware stores, construction sites, churches), Listserv email blasts, emails through community partner organizations, and word of mouth via promotion from community health workers at two different community health clinics of South Florida. Men who expressed interest in study participation were screened for eligibility in person or over the phone by members of the research team. Men were eligible to participate if they (1) self-identified as Latinx/Hispanic, (2) were between the ages of 35 and 60 years at enrollment, and (3) did not identify any cognitive or physical health issues that limited their ability to engage

in regular moderate or vigorous physical activity. Twenty interviews were completed.

Table 1 summarizes the demographic and health characteristics of participants. The average age of participants was 49.8 years. Approximately two thirds (65%) of the men were married, and one fourth (25%) of the men made <US$35,000 in annual income. Almost half (45%) of participants reported being of Cuban heritage, and the other half of participants noted connections and roots in other Spanish, Hispanic, or Latinx countries or subcultures. All procedures were approved by the University of Miami Institutional Review Board (University of Miami IRB Study #: 20181208). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants included in the study.

Data Collection

A member of the research team who was trained in community-based qualitative research carefully explained all study procedures, provided space and time for participant questions and clarifications, and facilitated the 20 individual interviews. The interviewer was a bilingual, bicultural Latina woman in her 30s who was a member of the research staff, and the interview was conducted in the participant's preferred language of English or Spanish; 70% ($n = 14$) were conducted in Spanish and the remaining 30% ($n = 6$) were conducted in English. The interviewer did not have a relationship with any of the participants prior to their inclusion in the study. The interviewer provided participants with sufficient information about herself and the goals of the study to generate rapport and perceptions of safety prior to the interview.

The semi-structured, in-depth individual-interview protocol was designed using a phenomenological approach, which is appropriate when the goal is to explore the meanings and perspectives of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest and asks them to describe the topic of interest in the context of their everyday lived experience. This process enables the researchers to develop a composite description of "what" and "how" people experience a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Topics covered within the interviews included cooking and eating habits, physical activity, health, manhood, goals, values, and health and stress. Sample interview protocol questions included the following: (1) Thinking about when you were growing up, what did you learn about being a man? (2) What did you learn it means to be Latino? (3) What defines a man? and (4) What characteristics are most important to you to portray to others? The interview process lasted approximately 1.5 hr and included completion of the informed consent process, a demographic survey (which captured the information reported in Table 1 such as age and ethnic heritage), the individual interview (which took about 60 min), and the paperwork to document and distribute the incentive of US$40 for their participation.

Table 1. Selected Characteristics of Study participants (100% Latino Men; N = 20)

Demographic characteristics	%	n
Ethnic heritage		
Cuban	45	9
Puerto Rican	5	1
South/Central America (Venezuela, Colombia)	20	4
Other Spanish, Hispanic, Latinx (Peru, Chile, Honduras)	30	6
Primary language spoken at home		
English	30	6
Spanish	70	14
Average age (years)	M = 49.8 years; Range = 35–60 years	
Marital status		
Divorced or annulled	15	3
Married	65	13
In a relationship but not married	15	3
Other	5	1
Income category		
Less than US$20,000	15	3
US$20,000–US$34,999	10	2
US$35,000–US$74,999	45	9
Over US$75,000	25	5
Rather not say	5	1
Education		
Some high school, high school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)	30 15	6 4
Trade/technical/vocational training/associate's degree	20	4
Some college credit, no degree	35	7
Employment status		
Employed, part time	5	1
Employed, full time	75	15
Unemployed, looking for work	15	3
Retired	5	1
Body composition		
Obese (BMI ≥ 30)	95	19
Average BMI	M = 35	

Note. GED = general educational development; BMI = body mass index.

Data Analysis

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim using an external transcription service, and, when necessary, translated into English for analysis. The primary analyst with expertise in qualitative analysis is a native-English speaker. Transcripts were checked for accuracy

by the trained qualitative analyst, and translation was completed by bilingual research staff familiar with the interview protocol to ensure that the meaning of the participants' narratives was not lost in translation. Qualitative analysis was predominately completed by a trained research staff person who has previous experience analyzing focus groups and interviews with men from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Additional research staff members with expertise working specifically with the Latinx population were consulted as needed throughout the analysis to ensure the codebook accurately reflected the perceptions and experiences of the participants in a cultural context. We used a thematic approach (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), similar to the methods previously used by the research team for analysis of qualitative interview data (Griffith & Cornish, 2018). This approach allows for the researchers to identify, analyze, and report themes and classifications that relate to the data and help to discover, organize, and describe interpretations of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A member of the research team (ECJ) trained in qualitative data analysis reviewed the transcripts to check for accuracy, familiarized herself with the transcripts, and updated the codebook by revising and expanding one that was used in a prior, similar study (Griffith & Cornish, 2018). An interrater reliability of 74.4% was established for the initially developed protocol and codebook. For these interview participants, the same protocol and codebook were revised to account for the inclusion of Latino men and the same analyst (ECJ) who developed and coded the initial interviews conducted this analysis. After revising the codebook, the interview data were analyzed by following five steps: (1) organizing interview responses into a series of direct quotes that could be accurately understood outside of the context of the interview; (2) double-checking the quotes and notes; (3) coding quotes per the codebook; (4) combining coded restatements across interviews and participants to form one consolidated document; and (5) reviewing the consolidated document to identify themes and subthemes to be included in the results.

Results

Themes emerged from the data describing participant perceptions related to the three broad concepts: (1) "What it means to be a Latino man," (2) "How I learned about being a Latino man," and (3) "How I embody being a middle-aged Latino man." We present our summary of the identified themes and subthemes below highlighted by concise interview excerpts that represent each subtheme and sometimes supplemented with other salient representative quotes from the interviews to better illustrate our findings using the participants' words.

Theme 1: What It Means to Be a Latino Man

Subtheme 1.1: Hardworking: "That's the Guy Who Has to Go Outside to Fight". In grappling with their perceptions and ways they defined "what it means to be a man," participants described attributes, characteristics, and behaviors they considered to be ideals that men should embody as well as specific roles men should fulfill. Being a hardworking provider for their families was identified as a key characteristic that a man should seek to embody. For example, one participant described men as follows: "the guy who has to go outside and fight. Fight in the way—you know, work harder and bring the family, and keep the family . . . good welfare or something like that" (P042, age 54). Relatedly, a specific role that participants suggested was important for a man to fulfill was being the head of the household and having sole authority over decision-making, as one participant explained, "The man of the house, the one who determines the final decisions of the house, of what needs to be done in the house or in anything" (P001, age 55). Interestingly, while participants did not share what they perceived would be the consequences of not achieving this archetype, they did share that these ideals may be evolving, as one participant added, "As far as what being a man is, like being respectful, being a hardworking being—what is now considered in a way chauvinist, but being the breadwinner" (P030, age 47). These perspectives were largely gathered as answers to the question, "What defines a man?" and rather than reflect on their own embodiment, participants referred to these notions in general as if speaking of their perception of other men, or an "ideal man." Importantly, participants did not seem to intentionally entangle hard work, providing for family, and being the central authority figure in their family. Nevertheless, an overwhelming pattern emerged during analysis as data indicated that participants consistently presented these key characteristics simultaneously that may imply that they perceive them to be highly intertwined. Furthermore, while they did not present any of these characteristics in hierarchical order, this coupling of breadwinning with familial authority may highlight the precarity of an ideal embodiment of manhood, particularly if considering the loss of ability to provide for family results in a loss of perceived authority or control.

Subtheme 1.2: Familism: "Families First and the Rest Is Nothing". Aside from being a central authority figure in their families, participants reported their sense of accountability to familial cohesion. That is, participants spoke about the importance of family, the social and emotional bonds that families create, and their accountability to this notion. Participants explicitly referred to the cultural roots of their specific brand of masculinity,

suggesting that they were not talking about a generalized masculinity or generic gender norms for what it means to be an adult male, but something they perceived to be unique to adult Latino men. A participant elaborated on this concept and described behaviors related to being head of the household and incorporated the larger ideal of familism (the importance of prioritizing family) beyond just the provision of material goods. He indicated,

> Being head of the household, being a good father, and taking care of his family. Not necessarily being a big breadwinner or anything like that, but just taking care of his family needs and then doing the best he can to ensure that his kids and his family has everything they need—not necessarily excesses. (P007, age 53)

Another participant highlighted the importance of family within Latinx culture, saying, "What is our culture? We are lovers. We are good parents. We are good families. We believe in families first and the rest is nothing. First is your family" (P042, age 54).

Beyond these examples, the aggregated data suggested an exemplification of masculinity that exists beyond the simplicity of being a breadwinner and authority figure. Participants presented a keen awareness of their positionality within family, their need to be present intimately as an innate part of their cultural upbringing. Fostering familial cohesion, taking part in raising children, and the prioritization of familial well-being were all seen as important components of being a man.

Subtheme 1. 3: Hegemonic Masculinity: "Looks Like a Man, Dresses Like a Man and Acts Like a Man". This third subtheme is defined by the characteristics or attributes that men sought to exhibit that allowed them to demonstrate that they were men. Some sought to personify characteristics associated with traditional machismo, while others looked to epitomize aspects of which can be seen as caballerismo, manhood, character, or benevolent masculinity. One key characteristic was their perceived importance of being cisgender (i.e., a sense of personal identity and gender expression that corresponds with their sex assigned at birth) and heterosexual. As one participant describes,

> The masculine sex, [is] a person who likes women and not like anything else. A person that because of their physiognomy looks like a man, a man who dresses like a man, acts like a man, and has many jobs that are exclusively made for [men] . . . showing yourself as a man, dressing like a man, not dressing like a woman . . . and also, at work, going to the men's bathrooms, and not the women's bathrooms. (P069, age 60)

Interestingly, others recognized the potential of a more fluid representation of an ideal while simultaneously propagating traditional social norms. As exemplified by one participant,

> Well, for me to defend the man's position, as we say macho man, masculine,—there's no scheme for that, there's no specific pattern. I always say that man can be defined in many ways, the way he behaves, the way he acts, respect others, inspire respect, listening. There's no scheme. Because there can also be the typical man that looks muscular, who goes to a gym, who exercises. (P029, age 45)

Aggregated data suggested these were ways they sought to separate themselves from anything that was not their ideal archetype of men. Participants were quick to imply heterosexuality and strong deviation from anything they considered to be feminine. Importantly, while some participants suggested a level of fluidity in their perspectives, a cisgender and heteronormative container for this fluidity was always suggested.

Theme 2: How I Learned About Being a Latino Man

Subtheme 2.1: Learned Roles: "By Being a Man, You Are Also the Protector". Participants spoke about their conduct as men, and how these behaviors related to cultural and gendered expectations they learned growing up. The men shared the attributes and roles they learned to exemplify as Latino men, and how they need to differentiate their roles from that of women. Participants shared that they agree with certain parts of their socialization while disagreeing with others. One participant talked about his perceived pros, cons, and the broader implications of being taught that a man should be the protector of the family. He explained,

> On my family side, they always taught me that, by being a man, you are also the protector, your family's protector, of your sister of your wife . . . [this is] positive because it helps you . . . by forming that image, you have a big responsibility. But at the same time negative because it's very related to machismo, like taking the woman as the weak sex and that's not so—it's something typical of Latinos, of the Latino community. (P040, age 37)

Another man linked what he learned from his father to be the role of provider and "boss" to machismo, indicating "Well, my father was very macho. The man was always the provider and the boss of the house and all of that" (P001, age 55). Furthermore, participants made clear distinctions when talking about traditional gender roles. Some men explained that gender roles are clearly

defined and should not be strayed from, "The man is the man, and the man doesn't have to do what the woman does, food, clean the house, [men] go to work and bring the money to sustain" (P076, age 52). Conversely, other men noted more fluidity in their roles and the ability to perform whatever task was needed at the time to contribute to the greater good of the family overall, as one man explained,

> In fact my mom taught me everything. I know how to do everything in a home, everything. Three brothers and my dad . . . My mom's motto is, 'Your pants aren't going to come off if you clean the house for me. (P005, age 41)

Another participant shared his discomfort with a deviation from his beliefs about being a man: "But a lot of times, nowadays, it's like—women are like, well, I can make just as much or more. So, it's almost—it feels weird because you were taught—you're supposed to support your family" (P030, age 47). There were a variety of passive and active "teachers" that participants credited for their socialization. Some men recalled being directly or actively taught, while most reported a passive learning process. In addition, the men reported that their most important lessons came from men and women and were intergenerational, stemming from grandparents, aunts and uncles, as well siblings, cousins, and friends.

Subtheme 2.2: Changing Roles: "I'm a Little Bit More Modern". Men acknowledged their perceived evolution of gender roles and how this affects their perceptions of manhood and how they choose to embody those characteristics. One participant said,

> Usually, a man is the center of the house; he is the one who goes out to work to make sure that he can support his home financially. Being Latino, that is what my father taught me; mostly, that my dad is the one who works and mom is the one who takes care of the house and raises the children . . . I'm a little bit more modern, in the sense that I know that nowadays women can also be the center of the home too. But my parents are old fashioned and that is what they taught us, but I see it different, I have lived in a different age. (P034, age 40)

Note that this participant anchors his understanding of traditional machismo in his ethnic identity that he describes as Latinx. Another participant indicated,

> As far as being a man, I mean, I appreciate having learned what being a man is like, I guess from a woman's eyes. It's different than more of the macho chauvinist that your older Hispanic men are. You get into that mentality, and I love my dad, but there are things about him that I'd probably change.

But yeah, I mean, I tend to watch more chick flicks than my girlfriend does. (P030, age 47)

It is important to note that participants often coupled a more fluid perception of masculinity with lessons learned, actively or otherwise, from women in their lives.

Theme 3: How I Embody Being a Middle-Aged Latino Man

When questioned about their own pursuits of manhood, masculinity, and machismo, two key attributes identified as crucial for a man to embody were respect and character. One participant noted, "Responsibility, strength, values. That specifically, character. The values, love for the family and the responsibility" (P017, age 59), while another provided, "From my father I learned, above everything else, to respect people, men and women, with no problems . . ." (P029, age 45). Men also indicated that, as a man, it is important to not only respect people in general but also respect your elders. One participant said,

> The matter of being a man, having responsibilities, behaving like a man, you know? Be respectful of adults, like I was taught, that before you pass on the side of an adult you had to say, "excuse me," it's "sir," and "Please take it," "How are you, sir?," "Good afternoon, Mr. Rodríguez, Mr. José, Mr. Carlos." It was the respect for authority, so you know, almost everything that was taught to me since I was small was towards authority, having respect for authority, the older ones, those were the ones that looked out for us, you know? (P075, age 58)

Interestingly, when asked about their own embodiment of manhood, participants often highlighted benevolence. That is, participants were quick to separate themselves from any view of masculinity that could be considered negative, or hegemonic. Hypermasculine attributes were othered while holding benevolent characteristics close.

Discussion

The purpose of this work was to explore (1) how do Latino men ages 35 to 60 years describe what it means to be a man and (2) what are the attributes that these men seek to show others that demonstrate their character, cultural values, and gender identity. The use of an intersectional lens sheds light on the notion that Latino men are not a static monolith, and that they define themselves and their ideals in a complex way that is at the nexus of gender identity, sexuality, race, and age. Our study participants deviated from notions of machismo in ways that were related to the

unique contexts in which they were raised. Their presentations and ideals of manhood sought to uphold their status as men in ways that are congruent with data from work with other men of color.

Our study participants noted the sociocultural dynamics in which Latino men learn about what it means to be a man throughout their lives may have pushed them toward patriarchal notions of masculinity. Participants intentionally departed from embodying patriarchal masculine and static hegemonic gender expressions in exchange for more positive, egalitarian, and feminist notions and demonstrations of their manhood. This decision was often the result of witnessing the detriments of traditional machismo on their families, particularly family matriarchs while growing up. Furthermore, our findings indicate that Latinx conceptualizations of manhood and the behaviors that uphold their manhood are closely intertwined with the importance of reflecting salient cultural values of accountability, specifically to their children and elders. The findings shed light on how self-conceptualizations of Latinx manhood and how demonstrations of manhood change from adolescence, through young adulthood, into middle age, and throughout the life course for Latino men.

Some of our findings are like that of previous work with African American men. Specifically, these findings highlight similarities between African American men and Latino men that reflect the experience of role strain and men's perceptions of stressors and strains on their health and life overall (Cornish et al., 2017; Griffith & Cornish, 2018). Gender role strain—initially introduced by Pleck (1995)—suggests that a key source of psychological experiences of stress that men experience is trying to fulfill gendered expectations that are contradictory, inconsistent, and harmful in ways that have negative implications for men's self-definition, health, and well-being. Both African American men and Latino men experience constant role strain that constantly shift to maintain a semblance of balance based on the precariousness of manhood and his current circumstances, but these factors are complicated by the structural racism, rigid masculine social norms, and other factors that make positive self-perception and respect from others difficult and complicated.

Participants of this study helped illuminate some unique key differences among Latino men, particularly those situated in the intertwined nature of familism and self-concretizations of manhood. Whereas previous findings suggest that African American men see their positive displays of manhood to be interwoven with perceptions of themselves as household faith leaders and family carriers of spirituality (Griffith & Cornish, 2018), this was not a prevalent notion, if present at all, in our data with Latino men. That is not to say that spirituality has not been found to be influential in the lives of Latino men (Heep, 2014; Hilton & Child, 2014); however, being a household driver of spirituality and religiosity was not as related to expressions of manhood in our Latinx sample.

Common themes in our findings were related to devotion to family, the precariousness of their ability to provide financially, and the sometimes-strenuous work they complete to do so, which was consistent with research on African American men (Griffith & Cornish, 2018; Griffith et al., 2013). Upholding self-conceptualizations of manhood that are centrally based in providing financially for family could have drastically negative implications for Latino men as they age, but particularly in midlife (Griffith et al., 2019; Vandello et al., 2019). In other words, as Latino men age, it may become increasingly difficult to uphold self-conceptualizations of masculinity based on their ability to fulfill the traditional provider role, which is a particularly important marker of status in the gender hierarchy among men. Consistent with Vandello and colleagues' (2019) conceptualization of precarious manhood, if men define themselves by their ability to contribute financially to their households as they naturally transition out of the active workforce due to age, it is reasonable that their self-conception will suffer.

As men age, they form and reform their own definition of what it means to be a man based on their unique experiences (Coles, 2008). As this work shows, a man's definition of manhood and the influence of machismo as a sociocultural construct on that characterization can vary for men of different ages. We consider age only as a proxy for pivotal life events that can meaningfully change a man's self-conceptualization of manhood that shape his experience with family, friends, coworkers, and others (Creighton & Oliffe, 2010). Life stages, social experiences, and maturation intersect to influence individuals' perceptions of what manhood and machismo mean (Griffith et al., 2019). Congruent with our findings, research suggests that protective implications of familismo are often strengthened with age, particularly for Latino men (Ruiz & Ransford, 2012).

Participants acknowledged the connection between what they learned about being a man, and how that mapped on to the traditional aspects of machismo. A "macho" man was perceived as a man who provided, protected, and was the boss of the house. There was discussion and additional emphasis that what they learned growing up about being a man was not necessarily how they currently perceived manhood, and was not always translated into what they personally embody in their day-to-day actions as middle-aged Latino men. Several participants talked about generational differences among the men in their families that influenced how they perceive and embody manhood. There were often comparisons to fathers or "older Latino men" who subscribed to notions

of traditional machismo, and while this was something that they themselves may have learned, they do not seek to personify. Our findings support the notion that it is essential to understand how gender identity is operationalized and how men "perform" gender to identify micro-level details that are congruent with the individual identities, needs, beliefs and values of individual and specific groups of men (Griffith & Cornish, 2018).

What our participants learned growing up about being a man was profoundly influenced by people in their lives they perceived as the primary household provider, regardless of their gender identity. For some men growing up in single-parent households being raised by a mother who took on all roles, the line between perceived traditional gender roles was blurred and ultimately influenced their views and embodiment of role fulfillment as they transitioned into the role of provider. Growing up in what they viewed as a nontraditional household led to deviations from traditional machismo. This could have been the result of decreased exposure to demonstrations of traditional machismo and increased exposure to fluid demonstrations of femininity that contradicted views of hegemonic masculinity shedding light on a more comprehensive and elastic view of manhood. Furthermore, for some participants, there was open acknowledgment that the gender roles they learned at a younger age were no longer as strictly defined and there was not only comfort, but pride in straddling demonstrations of manhood that deviated from traditional machismo. Both the changing times and their evolving definition of manhood as they transition into middle age provided the case for this more "modern" and more comprehensive take on gender roles. Exposure to more fluid demonstration of manhood may relieve friction resulting from precarious, and inflexible demonstrations of masculinity that can have negative social, behavioral, and physical health implications.

Strengths and Limitations

Despite the strengths of our approach, there are some limitations of our study, namely that we acknowledge that Latino men are not a homogeneous group and a sample size of 20 men with varying ethnic heritages was not large enough to allow us to evaluate differences in perceptions of manhood between Latinx ethnic subpopulations. We recognize that the ethnic diversity of Latino men and the context of south Florida may have shaped our findings in ways that should not be considered generalizable to or representative of all Latino men. We acknowledge that bias may have been introduced given the interviewer was a woman, which could have affected the way men responded to questions being asked. Translation of responses from Spanish to English where necessary for analysis may have led to a loss of meaning

that could have affected our final analyses. While we made every attempt to ensure that this was not the case, we recognize that a potential loss in translation could have affected our data. These data provide a strong foundation and methodology to inform future qualitative work on this same topic within a variety of different populations, including age and ethnic groups among Latino men to further this research.

Implications

It is imperative to consider what these findings, coupled with supportive literature, add to our collective conceptualizations of Latinx masculinities. Beyond a more intentional consideration of how age affects the way Latino men view and understand their masculinities, these findings beg the use of a more intersectional and gender-transformative lens that warrant a deeper consideration of how race, ethnicity, and sexuality (among other intersected identities) play a role in the creation of self-conceptualizations of manhood, particularly in the compounding of the precarity of manhood (Griffith et al., 2016). The embodiment of manhood and masculinity highlighted by our findings sheds light on the need to consider a more complete spectrum of factors that contribute to the creation of these self-conceptualizations, how they translate into behaviors, and how they can be leveraged in intervention. Analyses highlight the need to recognize and explicate the historical context. This historical lens includes the implications of violent colonization and the loss of power, agency, language, and culture on the construction of Latino manhood also is pivotal to a more comprehensive and holistic understanding (Hardin, 2002). For instance, fluidity in subscribing to socially constructed masculine norms may be attributed to proximity to the experience of historical and ongoing colonialism and imperialist environments. That is, there are undeniable differences between a White presenting, 6th generation, Mexican-origin, U.S citizen Latino man compared with an afro-Indigenous presenting, asylum seeking, Salvadorian Latino man fleeing conflict that undoubtedly will influence the perceived precarity of their masculinity as well as their ability to make change. We believe our findings provide support for an approach that does not pathologize Latinx masculinity but considers the synergistic factors that influence self-conceptualizations of masculinity, including age, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and direct of vicariously experienced trauma.

According to these men, the way they conceptualize being a Latino man highlights the importance of reflecting cultural values, interdependence with family, traditional and nontraditional ways of thinking about masculinity, and expectations of adult males. This, we believe, warrants a critical look at what is considered traditional and nontraditional to reconnect Latino men with

precolonial masculine ideals that may aid in the disentanglement of contemporary Latinx masculinities. These findings have implications for conceptualizations of machismo in ways that build on intersectionality, role strain, precarious manhood, and ethnic-specific notions of manhood toward a more equitable future.

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ORCID iDs

Luis A. Valdez https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3999-8387
Derek M. Griffith https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0018-9176

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